

Effects of Sex Stereotypes: Causal & Moral Attributions for Child Physical Abuse

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Introduction

Child Abuse

- An act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm (CAPTA) (42 U.S.C.A. § 5106g, 2014)
- More than 280,000 cases reported annually (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017)
- Variability in perceptions (Denov, 2003; Hetherton, 1999)

Sex Stereotypes

- Generalizations about men, women, boys, and girls (Fiske, 2018)
- Basis for making social judgments (Macrae & Quadflieg, 2010).
- Plays a role in reactions to child abuse (Leone, Hawkins, & Bright, 2018).

	Adult Stereotypes		
Men	Masculine	Agentic	Aggressive
Women	Feminine	Communal	Nurturing

(Koenig, 2018)

	Child Stereotypes		
Boys	Masculine	Rough	Outgoing
Girls	Feminine	Delicate	Reserved

(Koenig, 2018)

Attributions

Causal Attributions

- Everyday explanations for events (Fincham, 2002; Malle, 2004)

Responsibility Attributions

- Assignment of culpability (Fincham, 2002; Kelley, 1973)

Research Question

What are the effects of sex stereotypes on causal and moral attributions of child physical abuse?

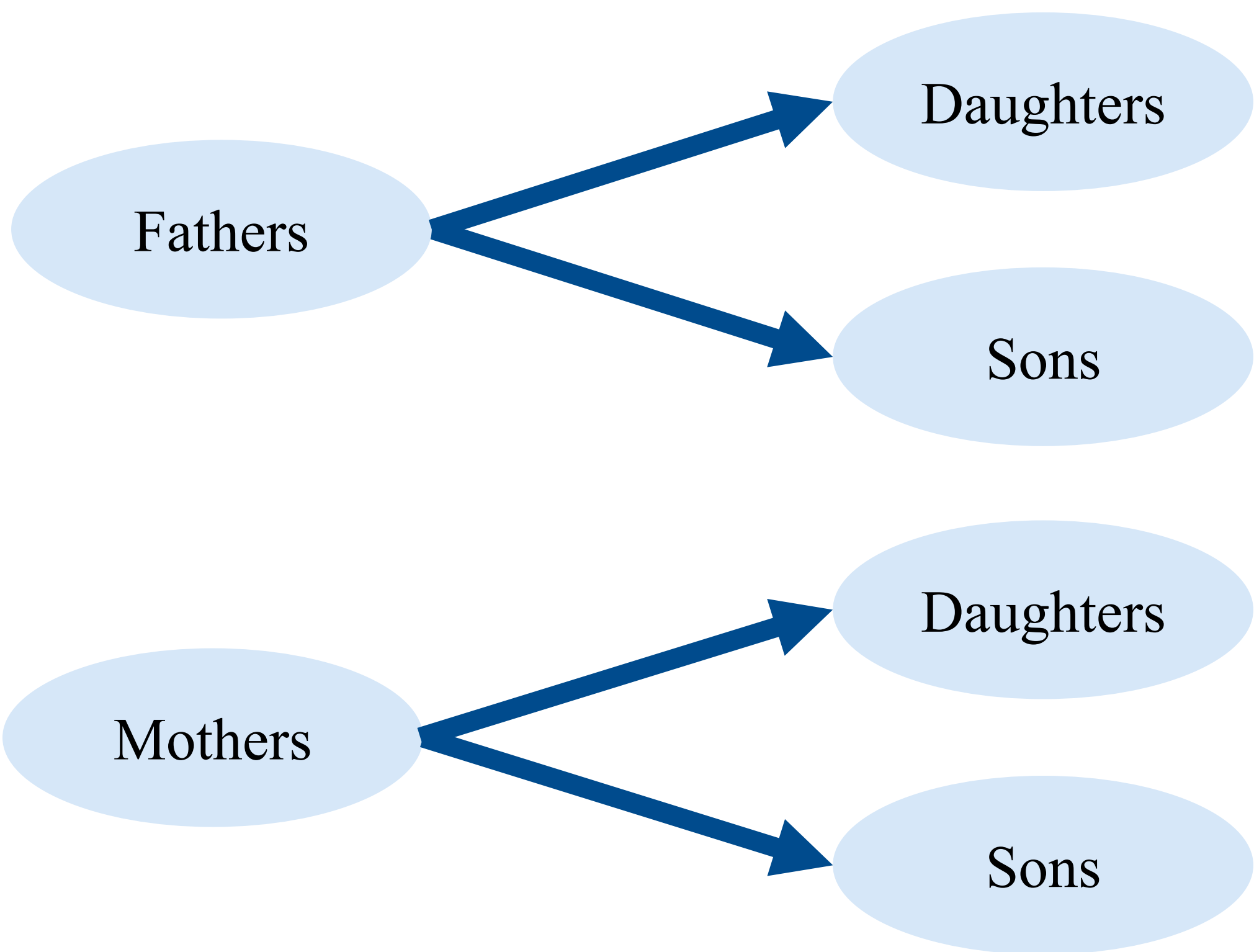
Method

Participants

- College students ($N = 152$)
- Predominately female, childless

Procedure

- Participants randomly assigned to read one of four parent-child physical abuse vignettes
- Systematically manipulated sex of parent/child



Attributions

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Uncertain Agree Strongly Agree

Views of the Parent

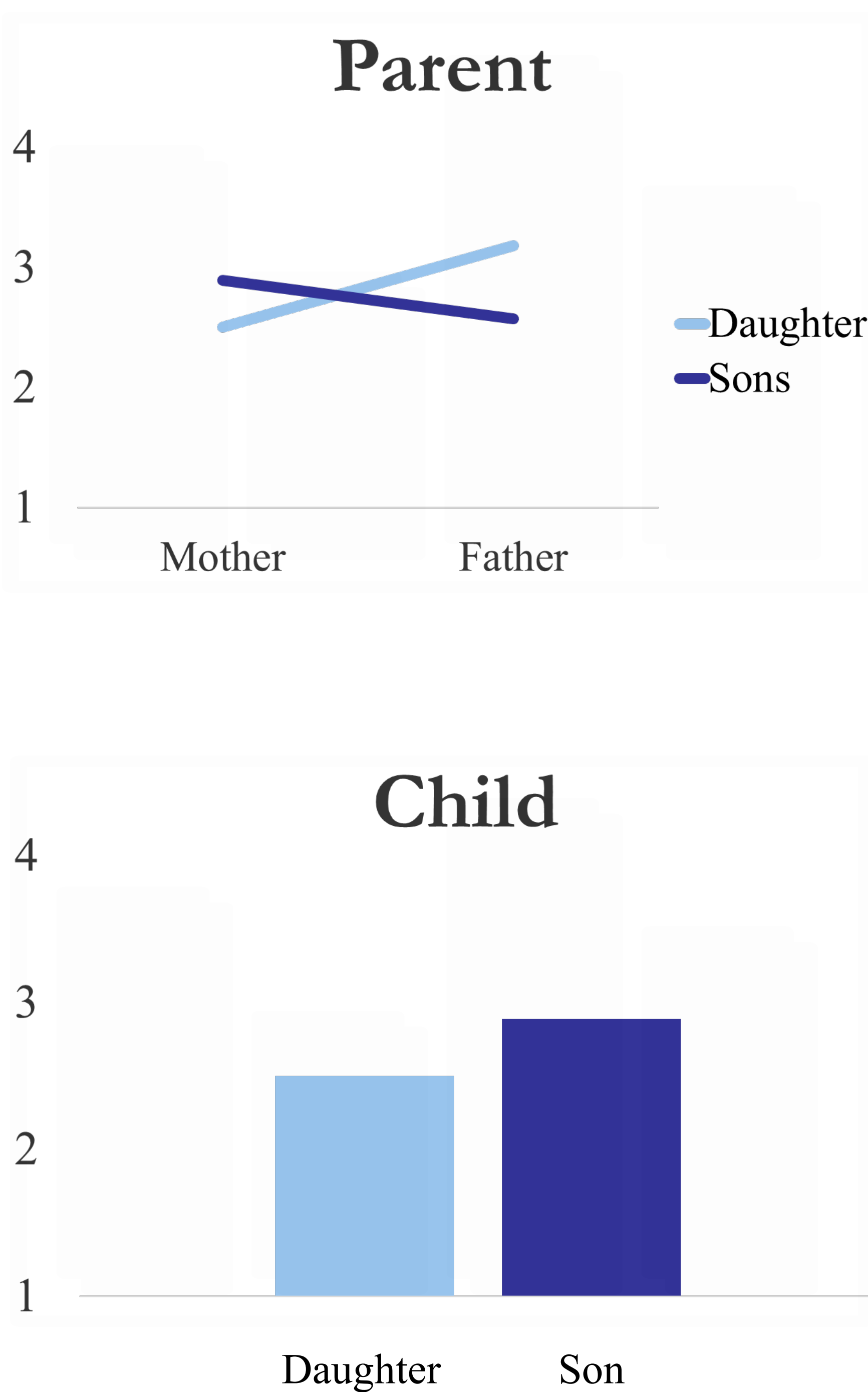
- The encounter was due to something about the parent
- The encounter was something that the parent deserves to be blamed for

Views of the Child

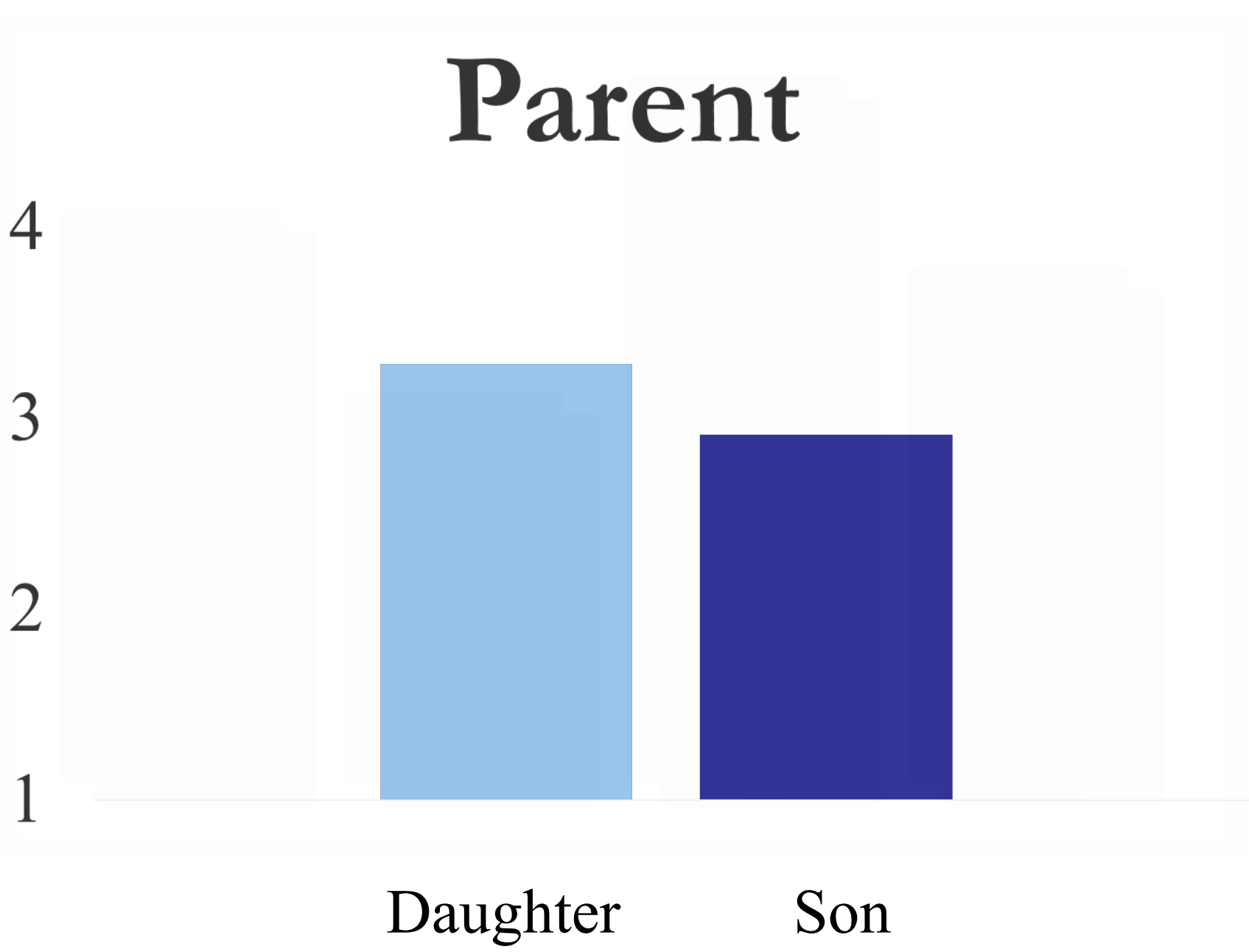
- The encounter was due to something about the child
- The encounter was something that the child deserves to be blamed for

Results

Causal Attributions



Responsibility Attributions



Discussion

Conclusion

Stereotypes influenced the way individuals processed information about child physical abuse

- Fathers cause abuse of daughters; mothers cause abuse of sons
- Boys are more provocative than girls
- Parents are more responsible for abuse of daughters than abuse of sons

Limitations

- College sample
- Predominantly childless
- Self-reporting

Future Directions

- Sampling
 - Non-college samples
 - Participants with children
- Unobtrusive measures of stereotyping (e.g., blood glucose)
- Individual differences as moderators
 - Need for cognition
 - Benevolent vs. hostile sexism
- Situational variables as moderators (e.g., provocative nature of child's behavior)

